

House Republican Press Release

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Representative Frey Introduces Bill to Protect Good Samaritans



HARTFORD-At the start of the General Assembly's 2005 Legislative Session, State Representative John H. Frey, R-Ridgefield, has introduced legislation to protect public safety workers who are injured or killed while serving as Good Samaritans during off-duty emergency situations. House Bill 5408 would extend workers'

compensation coverage to any police officer, firefighter or emergency medical services personnel employed by the state or one of its political subdivisions for any injury or fatality that occurs while such employee is responding to any off-duty emergency.

During his previous term in the General Assembly, Rep. Frey introduced similar legislation. He said that the issue of workers compensation benefits for Good Samaritans was initially brought to his attention by Jim Belote, a member and former chief of the Ridgefield Volunteer Fire Department. The legislation is also supported by Louis Yarrish, Chief of the Ridgefield Fire Department.

"On a daily basis, public safety workers risk their own safety, while both on and off duty, for the benefit of strangers," said Rep Frey. "This bill would protect them for offering their services as good Samaritans."

Rep. Frey noted a tragic example of a Good Samaritan who was not protected by workers' compensation benefits that occurred in Florida on June 8, 2002. Off duty firefighter Shane Kelly, 26, traveling with his wife, Rachel, came upon a serious accident on the Florida Turnpike. Shane, knowing that his skills and training as a firefighter could be helpful, didn't think twice about stopping to offer assistance. Unfortunately, a tractor trailer crashed into Shane and six other people assisting at the scene of the accident. Shane and another Good Samaritan, an Orlando doctor, lost their lives.

The Shane Kelly tragedy was the impetus for a change in federal law. In August 2002, Congress announced a bill that would ensure all police, fire and EMTs killed while serving others anywhere in the United States would be eligible for "in the line of duty" federal benefits. Up to that point, Shane Kelly's widow had been denied these benefits, including having this hero's name being placed on a plaque at the National Fire Academy.

“I’m hopeful that the State of Connecticut will not have to wait for a similar tragedy to take place before we provide workers compensation benefits to public safety personnel that are injured or killed while performing their trained duties while off duty,” said Rep. Frey.

The bill now goes before the Legislature’s Labor and Public Employees Committee.